

FRESHMAN STUDENTS' COPING MECHANISMS IN THE NEW NORMAL

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1. ABSTRACT

Coping mechanisms plays a very essential role to overcome and reduce the stress experienced by students. This study determined the coping mechanisms of the BEEd Freshman students of Cebu Technological University- Argao Campus, first semester of Academic Year 2020-2021 as the basis for an intervention scheme.

A descriptive survey method was used as means of gathering and interpreting data findings. The research instrument utilized was an adapted questionnaire from Geoman, et. al. (2019) which served as the main tool for gathering data to answer the research questions. The variables of the study are the coping mechanisms of the BEED Freshmen students in the new normal.

Findings of the study showed that the top three (3) dominant coping mechanisms of the respondents are telling themselves that they can do it and that they have managed similar situations before; thinking about the bigger picture (their goals or values to put things in perspective); and trying to handle things on their own especially on learning to use different gadgets and applications.

Hence, the proposed intervention scheme is recommended for implementation.

Keywords: coping mechanisms, descriptive study, intervention scheme

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2. INTRODUCTION

The world revolves and everything changes. This is true, especially in the education aspect. Everyone around the globe was confused on how to shift from the usual classroom classes to virtually motivated learning or offline-distant learning. This was because of the abrupt arrival of the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic. Almost 75 percent of the world's learners' population were impacted by school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020). This was a rough total of 1,576,021,818 students out of 91.3 percent of the total enrolled students in 188 countries (Toquero, 2020). This was a similar situation when China in 2003 experienced firsthand the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). In Hong Kong, for example, 1,302 schools were closed, 1,000,000 pupils stayed at home, and 51,000 instructors were rushing to keep themselves and their families safe during the outbreak (Toquero, 2020).

Philippines, as one of the developing countries of the world, was compelled to act accordingly and close schools for face-to-face interaction, disrupting the learning process of more than 1.7 billion children. Included in this sudden shift, is the Cebu Technological University-Argao Campus BEEd Freshman students. This group of students were the most affected entities, because they were the first K-12 Senior High School graduates, who were not able to experience an actual graduation ceremony and they were also the group who were immersed in an online class without experiencing physical college interaction. These students were having some difficulties in

adjusting and they needed coping mechanisms to overcome the challenges in the new normal.

Coping mechanisms play a very essential role to overcome and reduce the stress experienced by students. According to Adler and Park (2003), appropriate and effective coping may buffer the effect of stressful circumstances on the physical and mental health of individuals. In their everyday lives, university students have to face a vast range of demands, both academic and non-academic, that could affect their well-being. Academic demands, according to Webber et al. (2019), include adjusting to a new environment, overwork, insufficient time to complete academic activities, exam preparation and completion, and the pressure to perform.

Stress, as a result of these demands, could bring enormous harm to students' academic performance, as well as to their physical and psychological health. These harmful effects triggered the researchers' interest in the identification of coping mechanisms or individual resources which could be protective factors against the inherent stressors of the online university context (Tavocci et al., 2013). These resources or coping mechanisms could modulate the relationship between potential threats and stress response, encouraging better academic adjustment of the BEEd Freshman students.

In CTU- Argao Campus, BEEd Freshman students are currently having their classes online due to the sudden spread of COVID-19. The only people allowed to go inside the University are the faculty and staff. This sudden shift created a barrier in the interaction between the teachers and the students and challenged the institution to make abrupt action. Students at the same time are experiencing varied difficulties. These include environmental factors that are not conducive for learning like poor internet connection, household responsibilities, noisy environment, financial shortcomings, and other personal inconveniences.

Thus, this study aimed to examine the students' coping mechanisms, as they are now engaged in the new normal set-up in education. The findings of this study would be useful to help students become productive and motivated to learn meaningfully and would allow the researchers to design an intervention scheme.

3. METHODS

This study utilized the descriptive survey method as means of gathering and interpreting data findings. The method described the coping mechanisms of the BEEd Freshman students of Cebu Technological University- Argao Campus towards online learning is the new normal. The researchers utilized an adapted questionnaire from undergraduate research presented to the Teacher Education Department of Cebu Technological University- Argao Campus, entitled "Adjustment Mechanism of the Students in the New Teacher Education Curriculum" by Geoman, et. al (2019), as a medium in collecting data and gathering responses as the basis of formulating an intervention scheme and further recommendations.

This study was conducted at Cebu Technological University-Argao Campus. It is one of the nine satellite campuses of the CTU System located in the Southeastern part of Cebu. CTU-Argao Campus is known for its excellent training, particularly in the Teacher Education Department.

The respondents of this study were randomly selected using the simple stratified sampling technique. The researchers utilized an adapted questionnaire from Geoman, et. al. (2019) which served as the main tool for gathering data to answer the research questions. The questionnaire has only one part which contained twenty-five questions about the coping mechanisms of the BEEd Freshman students of Cebu Technological University- Argao Campus. The respondents rated themselves on each of the items by checking the column which indicates how often they do a particular coping mechanism.

The frequency counts and percentage distribution of the respondents' profile in terms of age and gender were determined using Frequency Count and Simple Percentage. The coping mechanisms of the BEEEd Freshman students in the new-normal were summarized, analyzed, and interpreted using the Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation (SD).

A four-point scale was used in categorizing how often the BEEEd Freshman students do a particular coping mechanism. The categorical responses are four (4) for always, three (3) for sometimes, two (2) for seldom and one (1) for never, with the corresponding standard deviation, weighted mean and interpretation. The range of the weighted mean would be the following: 1.00 -1.75 (Never), 1.76 – 2.50 (Seldom), 2.51 – 3.25 (Sometimes), 3.26 – 4.00 (Always). The significant difference in the student's level of coping mechanisms when grouped according to section was also summarized, analyzed, and interpreted by one way analysis of variance.



Figure 1: Location Map of the Research Environment

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Age Profile

As shown in the table above, there are 45 total respondents. Four (4) or 8.89% of which are at the age of 21 years old and above, twelve (12) or 26.67% are 20 years old, twenty-six or 57.78% are 19 years old, and three (3) or 6.67% are 18 years old and below. The age 19 years old got the highest frequency which is twenty-six (26) or 57.78% of the total respondents, which is also their average age, while the age bracket 18 years old and below got the lowest frequency which is three (3) or 6.67% of the total respondents. This shows that the BEEEd Freshman students are of legal age.

Table 2: Age Profile

Age	f	%
21 and above	4	8.89
20	12	26.67
19	26	57.78
18 and below	3	6.67
Total	45	100.01
Average Age	19	

The respondents of the study are included in the provision of the new curriculum who graduated from their Senior High

School at the age of 17 years old and above. The four age brackets in the table above are currently in their 1st year level in the College of Education. The implementation of the K-12 Program under Republic Act 10533 s.2012 supported this claim since this program covers Kindergarten and 12 years of Basic Education (six years of Primary Education, four years of Junior High School, and two years of Senior High School).

4.2 Gender Profile

As shown in Table 3, out of forty-five (45) respondents, forty (40) or 88.89% are females and five (5) or 11.11% are males.

Table 3: Gender Profile

Gender	f	%
Male	5	11.11
Female	40	88.89
Total	45	100.00

This means that there is a greater number of females who took up Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) than males. This is supported by the current research which indicates a gender gap between males and females with respect to graduation rates from higher educational institutions (Higher Education Policy Institute, 2016). This is also agreed upon by Goldrick-Rab (2006). According to him, it is indicated since 2000 that women have made up almost 60% of enrolled students in colleges and universities across the nation. Talking about elementary education, Groskop (2006), stated that teaching of young children is considered as a “soft option” when it comes to a job in the public domain. However, the assumptions that underpin this worldwide phenomenon differ from society to society. Because working with children was connected with child-care rather than teaching, school teaching was long assumed to be a woman's career and job (Skelton, 2009). School teaching has long been viewed as a desirable career for women who want to preserve the idea that young children are cared for by women rather than men (Oyler, et al., 2001).

4.3 Coping Mechanisms in the New Normal

Table 4 presents the coping mechanisms of the BEED Freshman students in the new normal along with their academic challenges. There are 25 indicators on coping mechanisms where the respondents are asked to rate themselves in a four-point scale. The categorical responses are four (4) for always, three (3) for sometimes, two (2) for seldom and one (1) for never, with the corresponding standard deviation, weighted mean and interpretation. As reflected in the table, indicator 6 (**I tell myself that I can do it, for example, that I have managed similar situations before**) obtained the highest weighted mean of 3.76 with a categorical response of Always and is interpreted as happening all the time. This indicates that the respondents do tell themselves that they can do it, for example, they have managed similar situations before as a source of coping mechanism. This is supported by Coon (1998) in his book, *Introduction to Psychology: Exploration and Application*, that in stressful conditions, coping statements are used to filter out or counteract negative self-talk. Negative self-talk is opposite to positive self-talk which is about showing yourself some self-compassion and understanding for who you are and what you have been through (Jantz, 2019 as cited by Mead, 2021). This is also associated with what Dante Dixson and his co-authors have said, as cited by Vicki Zakrzewski (2021), that “high-hoppers” had better academic and psychological outcomes, including belief about their chances of success within the future, when compared to “low-hoppers”. Within the same study that linked mindfulness to self-efficacy, the researchers found that positive self-talk, is employed by “high-hoppers”- is related to one’s ability to heal from failure.

Table 4: Coping Mechanisms of BEED Freshman Students in the New Normal

Coping Mechanism Indicators	WM	s	Categorical Response	Interpretation
1. I try to handle things on my own especially on learning to use different gadgets and applications.	3.62	0.58	Always	Happens all the time
2. I take part in enjoyable extra-curricular activities like participating on webinars and other online activities provided by the University for us.	3.27	0.69	Always	Happens all the time
3. I focus on the school work until it is complete.	3.60	0.50	Always	Happens all the time
4. When I am stressed with online activities, I exercise (run, go to the gym, swim, dance, etc.)	3.09	0.79	Sometimes	Happens most of the time
5. As I am facing new-normal challenges, I think about the bigger picture (my goals or values to put things in perspective).	3.75	0.49	Always	Happens all the time
6. I tell myself that I can do it, for example, that I have managed similar situations before.	3.76	0.43	Always	Happens all the time
7. I write about my problems and feelings about my online classes.	2.64	0.86	Sometimes	Happens most of the time
8. When I am stressed with my online class, I pursue a hobby or interest such as cooking, drawing, playing an instrument, etc.	3.24	0.68	Sometimes	Happens most of the time
9. I play videogames and watch TV or videos during online class.	1.87	0.89	Seldom	Happens at times
10. I panic or "freak out" every time a new activity is posted in Google classroom, Edmodo, and other online platforms, without trying to fix it.	2.47	0.66	Seldom	Happens at times
11. I do not join online classes on purpose to get my other school works done.	1.67	0.83	Never	Does not happen at all
12. I stop caring about home-based tasks.	2.02	0.92	Seldom	Happens at times
13. I become quiet (talk less about my struggles and challenges in the new-normal).	3.13	0.66	Sometimes	Happens most of the time
14. I do not turn on my mic during virtual sessions, even if my teacher calls me because I do not know the answer.	1.91	0.87	Seldom	Happens at times
15. I sleep to escape the learning tasks and activities given, especially tasks that have longer deadline.	1.69	0.79	Never	Does not happen at all
16. I skip virtual classes to avoid tests I am not ready for or assignments I have not finished.	1.27	0.58	Never	Does not happen at all
17. I vent or complain about online class to my friends outside of my school program.	2.22	0.79	Seldom	Happens at times
18. I talk to my parents about what is bothering me in online class.	2.47	0.97	Seldom	Happens at times
19. I go to church or place of worship to relieve my stress from my online studies.	3.20	0.63	Sometimes	Happens most of the time
20. I have fun with other people to get my mind off the school tasks and activities.	2.96	0.80	Sometimes	Happens most of the time
21. I ask teachers questions about assignments or coursework.	2.58	0.78	Sometimes	Happens most of the time
22. I talk to others to get my mind free from the hardships I encounter in online class.	3.29	0.55	Always	Happens all the time
23. I get extra help from my classmates in answering activities I struggle with.	3.00	0.64	Sometimes	Happens most of the time
24. I do group studies with my classmates via Zoom and Google meet.	2.02	0.92	Seldom	Happens at times
25. I hang out with friends by playing online games or watching movies.	2.36	0.93	Seldom	Happens at times
Totality	2.68	0.73	Sometimes	Happens most of the time

Legend:	WM-Weighted Mean	s-Standard Deviation
	Weighted Mean Interval	Categorical Response
	3.26 - 4.00	A Always
	2.51 - 3.25	So Sometimes
	1.76 - 2.50	Se Seldom
	1.00 - 1.75	N Never

On the other hand, indicator 16 (**I skip virtual classes to avoid tests I am not ready for or assignments I have not finished**) got the lowest weighted mean of 1.27 with a categorical response of never and is interpreted as does not happen at all. This implies that the respondents are never skipping virtual classes to avoid tests they are not ready for or assignments they have not finished. This is supported by Erica Cirino (2016), who states that while most of college class sessions may be lectures, some will involve in-class assignments, quizzes, and exams. And since the students are just skipping class, they would not be excused, instead, they will get a zero. Missing out on these in-class activities- no matter how small they seem- can cause their grades to nosedive.

Another reason why students never skip virtual classes to avoid tests they are not ready for or assignments they have not finished, is because skipping classes can become a habit and unexcused absence, will send a message to the teacher that the student is not serious about the class or the grade (Witte, 2019).

For the standard deviation, the highest is 0.97 by indicator 18 (I talk to my parents about what is bothering me in online class). This means that there is a high variation in the answers of the students in this indicator. While the lowest standard deviation is 0.43 by indicator 6 (I tell myself that I can do it, for example, that I have managed similar situations before). This means that there is lesser variation with the answers of the respondents in this indicator.

4.4 Significant Difference in the Students' Level of Coping Mechanisms When Grouped According to Section

Table 5 shows the results of the computation of the data needed to get the comparison of whether there is a significant difference in the students' level of coping mechanisms when grouped according to section.

ANOVA: Single Factor

SUMMARY

Table 5: Level of Coping Mechanisms when Grouped According to Section

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>
BEEd- 1A	15	40.92	2.728	0.061074
BEEd- 1B	15	39.08	2.605333	0.09757
BEEd- 1C	15	40.71	2.713778	0.028619

ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F-crit	Decision	Interpretation
Between Groups	0.1350479	2	0.067524	1.08	0.35	3.22	Accept the null hypothesis.	There is no significant difference in the students' level of coping mechanisms among the three (3) sections.
Within Groups	2.62167704	42	0.062421					
Total	2.75672494	44						

It was hypothesized that there is no significant difference in the BEEd Freshman students' level of coping mechanisms when grouped according to sections namely BEEd 1A, BEEd 1B, and BEEd 1C.

As to the difference in the students' level of coping mechanism, the computed F-value of 1.08 is less than the critical F-value of 3.22, while the p value of 0.35 is greater than the alpha (α) at 0.05 level of significance, which leads to the decision of accepting the null hypothesis. There is no significant difference in the students' level of coping mechanisms among the three (3) sections.

This implies that the BEEd Freshman students' level of coping mechanisms do not differ when grouped according to section. This is supported by Laursen and Hoff (2006) as cited by Freire, C. (2020) which states that by examining individual profiles in light of their coping flexibility, a person-centered approach can be used to discover groupings of students with a high degree of internal similarity in their repertoire of coping techniques.

People vary in certain styles of coping or prefer to use particular coping strategies over others. These differences in coping styles usually reflect differences in personality and attitude. However, some situations that require coping are likely to elicit or bring out similar coping responses from most people. Work-related stressors, for example, are more likely to set off problem-solving solutions. In this study, the situation of the respondents is school-related, where their coping mechanisms elicit the same or nearly relevant problem-solving strategies even if they have different sections.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The BEEd Freshman students of Cebu Technological University-Argao Campus are flexible and competent students. Even with the abrupt shift from face-to-face class to online learning, they are able to cope with it with the help of various coping strategies or mechanisms especially doing self-talk to motivate themselves. This new normal set-up is a big hurdle in their academic journey but they are able to modify it and use it in their own advantage without resorting to aggressive actions. Thus, the findings agree and in consonance with the Transactional Theory of Stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1987) that was used, which states that one of the coping styles of a person is emotion-focused.

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